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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFATT

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: ABYAN HEATS UP: ANTI-ROYG CLASHES ROCK ZINJIBAR

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. In the deadliest day of fighting this year, supporters of new Southern Movement champion (and former jihadist) Tariq al-Fadhli clashed with security forces in Abyan governorate, leaving at least 20 dead and 40 injured. The fighting in Abyan on July 23 sparked additional protests in Dali' on July 24 and 25, leading some to speculate about the beginning of a sharper conflict between the ROYG and supporters of the Southern Movement. With violence flaring in Sa'ada simultaneously, greater instability in Abyan and southern Yemen could place additional pressure on an already stressed regime. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) A government-approved event outside the home of former jihadi turned Southern Movement supporter Tariq al-Fadhli sparked violent clashes with security forces on July 23 in Zinjibar (Abyan governorate). Fadhli urged the thousands of gathered men (estimates ranged from 5,000 to 7,000) to move to the Central Security prison in Zinjibar in order to liberate the Southern Movement prisoners being held there, according to government media. (Note: No official figures exist on how many prisoners are held in the Zinjibar facility. The Yemen Observatory for Human Rights estimates it could be as high as 200. End Note.) Associated Press correspondent in Abyan Ahmed al-Hajj told PolOff on July 25 that some of the protesters were armed with assault rifles and RPG launchers. Government security forces fired on the protesters with live rounds and shelled Fadhli's house, according to media reports. Hajj said that the number of dead had risen to 20 as of July 25, with at least 40 injured, including the Deputy Security Director. Protesters, in return, fired on the governor's office and burned two police vehicles. After the initial fighting ended, tribesmen from across Abyan traveled to Zinjibar to break the ROYG-imposed siege on Fadhli's compound. Vice President Abdurabu Mansour Hadi mediated a temporary end to the conflict late on July 23, according to Hajj.

¶3. (C) Short of accusations blaming the violence in Abyan on "armed partisans," the ROYG did not appear to be doing much to address simmering discontent in Abyan. "The government does not know who to talk to. Who are the real leaders of the Southern Movement inside Yemen?" ruling General People's Congress (GPC) Member of Parliament Nabil Basha said on July ¶25. Deputy Prime Minister of Defense and Security Rashad al-Alimi and Minister of Interior Rashad al-Masri were summoned to answer questions in Parliament about the ROYG's response on July 26. The opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), former President of South Yemen Ali Nassir Muhammad, and former Prime Minister of South Yemen Haydar Abubakr al-Attas all condemned the ROYG's response to events in Abyan. Ali Salim al-Beidh, former Vice President of South Yemen, issued a statement on letterhead from the "Office of the President ) Democratic Republic of Yemen," once again requesting international intervention in the case of southern Yemen.

14. (S) The violence in Zinjibar set off protests in neighboring Dali' and Lahj governorates and in the towns of Jaar and Yafa, both in Abyan. Demonstrations, which began in Dali' on July 24, continued through July 25, resulting in at least one death and four injuries, including three police officers. Hundreds of demonstrators in Radfan (Lahj governorate) called for the release of political prisoners. Southern Movement supporters also briefly set up roadblocks on major thoroughfares across Dali' and Lahj, according to media reports. An al-Mass Company building in Jaar owned by Presidential nephew and Central Security Forces (CSF) Commander Yayha Saleh was hit with RPGs on July 24. Since July 23, the ROYG has deployed extra security forces on Abyan's roads, attempting to prevent armed men from Yafa from joining protesters in Zinjibar. Southern Movement leader Ali Haitham al-Ghareeb told PolOff on July 25 that a large group of unarmed men was marching from Yafa to Zinjibar in a show of solidarity. Ghareeb said that although security forces attempted to stop the protesters at checkpoints, they were unable to keep them back because of their high numbers. The ROYG also shut off mobile phone communications in Zinjibar on July 23, local journalist Mohammad al-Qadhi told EmbOff on July 25.

COMMENT  
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15. (C) The issue of political prisoners has become a flashpoint for resentment across southern Yemen. Southern Movement leaders claim that the ROYG has upwards of 6,000 detainees in custody. The recent violence in Abyan is indicative of the political protest / ROYG crack-down / political protest cycle we have witnessed since April. Tariq al-Fadhli's heavily armed supporters ) no doubt including a number of his former jihadis ) add a more dangerous element to the mix, however, which the Southern Movement has so far found to be useful. As long as President Saleh continues to underestimate and dismiss the threat that widespread southern discontent poses to his regime, he is unlikely to take any serious action to address the causes of the unrest, and rely on repressive measures to keep it in check. END COMMENT.  
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